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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes particular areas in which research is needed within the fields of community organization and community development. Proposals are based on field research and findings of a two year (1977-79) Community Citizen Organization Study. The report is organized according to the four major categories of analysis in this original study--community organizations, school system research, cities, and federal and state policy. The author suggests that among the major focuses of future research should be multipurpose community development organizations which have been particularly active in educational issues, traditional school organizations such as the PTA, organizations mandated by federal or state law, ad hoc organizations and their roles in influencing school issues, increasing uniformity among school districts due to federal influence, decentralization in large city school systems, school board elections, the nature and extent of school-to-community information flows, media coverage of educational issues, types of organizations active in school politics, city encouragement of citizen participation, communication and networking among traditional city organizations, and federal policy goals. (DB)

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:

TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE 1980's

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October 1979

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:

TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE 1980's

Introduction

This paper proposes an outline for needed future research activities based upon the field research and findings of the Community Citizen Organization Study (1977-1979). The research on the 16 organizations has raised some issues which require additional research and discussion; especially if the findings are to serve as a basis for policy development and implementation.

The research questions raised here fall into the major categories of analysis used in the Citizen Organizations Final Research Report (hereinafter referred to as the Final Research Report): community organizations, school systems, and cities. As the research effort suggested, Federal and State policies on citizen participation and educational programs are central to an understanding of organizational behavior and effectiveness. Therefore, these four areas will serve as the major subjects of this paper.

Community Organizations

The major focus of future research on community organizations should build on our findings regarding organizations and concentrate attention on

four major categories of organizations: (1) multipurpose community-development organizations; (2) traditional school organizations, e.g., P.T.A.'s, Home and School Associations; (3) organizations mandated by Federal or State law; and (4) ad hoc organizations. Since class has proved to be such an important variable in our research, continued research on lower- and middle-class organizations is essential for comparative study. We eliminated the traditional parent groups from our study; however, it remains important to determine if, and under what circumstances, such organizations in lower-income areas are involved in setting school policy. Ad hoc organizations, we think, are particularly appropriate to the needs of the poor and working class because they do not require emphasis on maintenance and because they encourage more extensive networking. These conclusions warrant some further investigation. Continued review of mandated organizations should verify or deny our pessimistic view of those organizations.

Since community development organizations are the most active organizational forms in lower-income communities, more extensive research should be pursued to explore how these organizations determine their priorities and the circumstances under which they concern themselves with school issues. Special attention should be given to the identification of multipurpose organizations which have been active in educational issues. It would be especially important to find more successful lower-class models and to study those organizations in depth to determine what makes them successful.

At a recent Social Policy conference on neighborhood groups (New York City, 1979), we questioned a number of community organization leaders about

their lack of interest in school issues. They indicated that the desegregation issue had been a key factor in their avoiding school problems. Several organization leaders indicated that they felt that it was a mistake to ignore school issues and they had added, or were planning to add, education to their agendas. One would expect that organizations tied to neighborhood needs must at some point address school issues. Research should focus on why certain organizations have determined to pursue education issues and why others continue to eschew them. The impact of exclusion of school issues from development plans is another area of research concern.

- Service-delivery organizations are identified primarily by their activities in providing direct services (generally funded by government agencies) to clients. These organizations have been funded because they offer potential alternative delivery systems to school systems in providing education services. Further intensive study of service delivery organizations should clarify a pattern of types of services provided and the quality and character of those services. Are they, in fact, different from the services provided by school systems themselves? Are these service organizations able to improve the quality of services or mobilize community involvement or interest in broader school policy issues? Does support of these organizations contribute to community participation or deter it?

The growing importance of the community development organizations must be compared with the total lack of advocacy organizations in lower-income neighborhoods. In our Final Research Report, July 1979, we suggested that an organizational structure which had separate components dealing with service delivery and advocacy might be viable. We feel that substantial

research is called for in identifying and analyzing such multiunit organizations. Factors such as the overlap of leadership and membership, the ability of an advocate unit to mobilize service recipients, and the overall funding structure should be examined in depth. Such research would generate additional information on what may be the most effective organizational form for training neighborhood residents, providing local services, and pursuing policy goals.

The selection process for choosing organizations for our study was designed to lead us to the most active organizations. The selection process also allowed for coverage of the types of organizations we had determined to include in the study. Our emphasis on lower-income organizations was a major factor in the selection process. At one point in the study we asked for an inventory of all organizations in each city. We discovered that each Mayor's Office kept a file on organizations and used it selectively. Additional research should explore how these other organizations function, how active they are and under what circumstances, the way in which local officials use these organizations, and the extent to which overlap of membership occurs. The question of the relationship of school organizations to other community organizations is also worthy of additional study. It would be useful to explore the circumstances under which such school concerns become a legitimate part of information exchanges among community organizations. One could, for instance, explore the role of a spectrum of citizen organizations in desegregation efforts to determine whether or not they ease the process of change or make it more difficult to achieve.

Our decision not to study ad hoc organizations and their reactions

to major school issues over a period of time appears to us to have been a major shortcoming of our study. Particularly for lower-income organizations, such ad hoc efforts are potentially more efficient and productive than other types of community organizational activity. Some further research should be pursued to analyze ad hoc community organizations and their roles in influencing school issues. Their leadership and membership should be analyzed with a view to their particular usefulness for lower-income groups. The limited concern with maintenance and the extent of vertical networking would also be of interest. Such research should provide important data on the advantages or disadvantages of these efforts for lower-income organizations.

The issue of ad hoc organizations also raises the question of the ability of an issue to generate a broad-based movement in a lower-income community. Piven and Cloward (1979) in a recent article have suggested that community organizers who in the 1960's were organizing around political/social issues have since become part of the leadership of established organizations which focus primarily on consumer issues such as utility rates. These consumer issues are more directly related to the concerns of middle-class communities than to those of poorer neighborhoods. Without community organizers and advocacy organizations, low-income communities have little on which to base movements seeking change on political, social or economic issues (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1974). Hence, the ability of a community to come together on an ad hoc basis is an important measure of its ability to deal with policy issues, including school and education policy.

Membership and Leadership Characteristics

Our research indicated that passive membership types are generally

the norm in lower-income communities. The membership base of an organization is central to the functioning of the organization, especially if the organization has an advocacy role. Our membership typology recognized differences between membership concepts but did not take the next step and distinguish participants from members. Using the data collected in the Community Organization Study as a base, research should be conducted which will analyze those characteristics of organizations which encourage active membership participation.

One of the factors which should be examined is the importance of organization size. Other studies have indicated that as size increases, active participation declines (Kotler, 1979). This finding is especially important for those developing organizations which are statewide (Mass Fair Share) or even multistate (ACORN). If size is an impediment to generating active participation, can such organizations be structured so that participation continues at the local level through neighborhood cells? Or will the size of the organization prove to be too large a barrier?

Voluntary membership is defined as individuals affiliated with an organization because it reflects their interests and allows them to work towards a common set of goals. This definition places the organization in a passive role, with the prospective members exercising a choice. Yet our research indicated that organizations can recruit members and that such recruitment often leads to active participation. This was evident primarily in two organizations, both advocacy, both middle-to-upper-income, which actively pursued prospective members. We were able to document the organizational activity but were unable to examine fully the techniques used or the results achieved by these practices. Additional research could

focus on the ability of lower-income organizations to recruit members and the circumstances under which they are most successful.

Our findings regarding leadership patterns should be pursued first to test the general ability of leaderships and also to determine the sources for the development of leadership in lower-income communities. Our research included cases in which the leadership was developed both inside and outside the organization. The training that these individuals have undergone may not be clearly visible within a single organization; it may span a number of organizations over a long period of time (Verba, 1961). In order to examine these cases in greater detail, we propose that a number of case studies of organizational leadership be conducted. These case studies, which would require indepth interviewing, would focus on the leaders: their backgrounds, education, role in the community; the experiences which they underwent both inside and outside the community; and their current role in their organization. Studies of 25 active leaders in lower-income organizations could indicate the type of training which would be most useful to organization leaders as well as suggesting the types of issues which seem to mobilize those individuals. Our interviews suggested that many of the advocate leaders came out of the anti-poverty agencies of the 1960's. These case studies would indicate if such training grounds continue to exist.

Our research identified staff leadership as one of the most significant leadership patterns in lower-income communities. Several questions need to be addressed. What is the relationship of these staff leaders to the community organizations they direct? Because staff positions require high levels of technical expertise, it is important to determine if the

staff directors of organizations are brought in from the outside or if they are indigenous to the community. Our research indicated that most often the staff directors were neighborhood residents and in some cases were instrumental in the development of the organization. The question of preparation of community leaders for this role is increasingly important. One of the organizations we studied made a significant effort to train community residents and put them into staff positions. However, this experiment proved unsuccessful as the leadership felt that the necessary time could not be invested in training these individuals when the technical skills were required immediately. Additional research on how some community development organizations conduct such staff training and perhaps use outside supports for such efforts may identify effective methods of increasing the pool of qualified neighborhood leaders.

Our research has also suggested that the issue of sex roles and leadership ought to be more fully explored (Jacquette, 1974). As noted in the Final Research Report, other researchers have suggested that most organizations rely on males to fill leadership positions (Perlman, 1976). However, our organizations relied largely on female leadership for both voluntary and paid staff leadership. Based on this finding, two issues need to be explored in greater depth. The first is that of the base and orientation of the organization. We would hypothesize that established organizations which have gained acceptance from decisionmakers would be more likely to have male leadership while less visible organizations with comparatively little acceptance would be led by females. Clearly, this hypothesis raises the issue of income and class since those powerless organizations will most likely be lower-income organizations.

The second issue to be addressed is the sex of the organizational leadership and the type of organization. Our research has indicated that, with some exceptions, the leadership of educational organizations tends to be female while the leadership of community-development organizations is more likely to be male. The traditional pattern of female leadership in education organizations is visible in the research but additional research is necessary to document more fully the question of sex roles in education organizations.

Networks

We had originally proposed an extensive research design specifically oriented towards examining networking activities in the three sites. The limited research that we did conduct has raised some questions regarding network structure. Additional research is required.

Our limited research on networks in each of the cities and among the organizations studied suggested the lack of contact and communication among organizations along horizontal lines. Vertical networks were more common to middle-income organizations. Our finding of a lack of ties to traditional city organizations should be looked at more carefully. Is there some overall explanation for the diminishing relationship between political parties, churches, civic groups, and unions and community organizations? Do they view their roles as competitive? Or is class a pervasive factor in the lack of networking?

Our study distinguishes between the networks of the organization leaders and the networks of the organizations themselves. Our data suggested that individual networks were the more prevalent in the organizations we studied. Such networks do not result in increasing the

knowledge or skills of other members of the organization. We suggest that additional research be conducted which distinguishes organizational networking activities, such as joint programs, to determine which activities have the greatest impact on organization members.

Another area of networking research builds on the work done in the Community Organization Study. We were able to map the multiplicity of organizational and individual contacts of the organizations but were unable to analyze fully the scope of those contacts. Further research which examines the intensity (number of contacts over a fixed period of time) and the structure of the network contact (a letter to a legislator or a telephone call to an official) may suggest in a more meaningful way the extent to which networking is a significant aspect of organizational activity for low-income organizations.

Additional research on the networking activities of community-development organizations would also be informative. Our research suggested that such organizations primarily limit their networking activities to other community-development organizations or funding sources. Additional research which focuses on the contact such organizations have with other neighborhood-based advocacy organizations and the conditions which facilitate such contacts may be suggestive of ways to increase such contacts.

Self-initiated citizen organizations are the most likely to take advocacy positions, network with other groups and pursue change in school systems. It is, therefore, important to determine the circumstances in which such groups are encouraged to function and be effective. Some research on other kinds of Federal programs and policies which support

self-initiated groups (e.g., ACTION, National Endowment for the Arts) would be useful to suggest optional policies to encourage networking among education groups.

There is a dearth of research on individual organizations, particularly lower-income organizations. The development of general conclusions regarding effectiveness requires initiation of more extensive research of organizations, individual case studies, and comparative case studies of all kinds. Some effort must be made, however, to use similar approaches and to replicate methods.

Federal and State Policy and Organizational Agendas

There is a need for in-depth followup of our conclusion that Federal policies mandating parent/school organizations and funding/service-delivery organizations have virtually eliminated differences among cities in the behavior of community organizations. These policies have shaped the strategies and structure of lower-income organizations. In particular, they have been a major factor in reducing advocacy-style organizations. Although the Systems Development Corporation is now engaged in a three-year study of citizen participation in education under Federal legislation, its emphasis is not on organizations and its definition of participation is all-inclusive. An extensive review of Federal policy goals in these mandated programs and of any differences in implementation of policies is an important area for additional research. Several recent studies, in contradiction to earlier analyses, demonstrate pervasive Federal influence, diminishing the role of local politics and policies. Increasing the Federal or State role may in fact be undermining local initiative and reducing the distinctiveness of local community organizations. One of the major conclusions

of the Final Research Report is the central role played by Federal, State and local policy in determining the orientation and structure of organizations. The importance of mandated involvement and the trend towards funding organizations to provide education services were shown to be key determinants of organizational structure, especially in lower-income communities.

The impact of government policy on multipurpose organizations also needs to be more closely examined. What appears evident is that government policies on community development are not planned to include education. There is a tendency to specifically exclude education from community development funding; in fact, Senator Proxmire admonished HUD officials to "stay away from education." A systematic review should be conducted of governmental policies that influence community organizations. The primary issues to be addressed should include a review of policies which support community organizations, and the method of support used (e.g., reimbursement of expenditures, grants, etc.) should be related to the development of community organizations to determine the extent to which such policies have, in fact, determined the growth and orientation of these organizations. Recent newspaper stories and reports on neighborhood organizations indicate the constructive role played by these groups and their growing numbers. More intensive analysis of their connection to Federal agencies, funding and priorities is certainly warranted.

Our research recognized the increasing importance of mandated and service-delivery organizations which result from Federal and State policy. Our Final Research Report conclusively documents, we believe, the failings of this approach to increasing citizen involvment in the formulation and

implementation of policy. Other Federal programs which include requirements for participation seem to show a greater ability to generate independent involvement of clients. Exploration of these programs should suggest why these differences in impact occur. The requirements for involvement in youth manpower programs and recent legislation for the handicapped can be examined in depth. The youth manpower programs may be of significance because they require broad community involvement but do not have a specific focus as in an ESEA Title I-mandated Parent Advisory Committee. Our research noted that the most effective mandated organization had this same characteristic: a mandate to exist without a specific programmatic mandate. P.L. 94-142: The Education of Handicapped Children Law provides another model of participation. The Individual Education Plans may encourage greater parental involvement. However, the individual client orientation of the involvement does not hold the promise of increasing the purposive incentives necessary to develop advocate organizations.

When examining other models of mandated involvement, we feel that the primary questions to be considered are:

- Is the mandate geared towards individual services or towards collective action?
- Does the organization have its own staff or does it depend on existing professional personnel?
- Is the organization free to determine its own issue agenda or does the mandate limit the organization to specific areas and activities?
- Is the organization designed to relate down to the community or up to institutions?

An examination of mandated involvement programs possessing some characteristics that encourage independence from the mandating institution may suggest some alternative ways in which mandated involvement in education

can be structured.

While our study focused primarily on the importance of Federal policy, the role of the States cannot be overlooked. Our three sites included active and passive States; the level of organizational activity to some degree reflected these differences. The importance of statewide organizations and the State-level connections of neighborhood organizations needs further exploration. Additional research should be done on those organizations which attempt to influence policy at the State level to determine the representativeness of these interests.

The sources and backgrounds of members and leaders and the types of issues the organizations pursue can be contrasted with the findings regarding organizations based in neighborhoods. Special attention should be paid to the ability of organizations to represent the interests of lower-income communities at the State level.

School System Research

Our study of three large city school systems show minimal differences in basic school politics but differences in operating style. This finding is in conflict with other research on local school systems. Other studies emphasize the importance of local politics as a direct influence on school politics. We would hypothesize that the increasing uniformity of school district politics results from professionalization of staff and the increasing role of Federal policy. The increased Federal presence seems to produce a corresponding decline in State and local influence. These findings should be tested in other cities and school districts.

Our analysis of the three school systems did not include a major comparative analysis of decentralization since all three cities had

roughly comparable levels of administrative decentralization. We hypothesized that in large school systems lower-income organizations, which are generally not organized at a citywide level, would not have meaningful access to school-system decisionmakers. Additional research should be conducted to explore the importance of decentralization to community organizations. Some effort should be made to identify more school systems such as Dallas, Detroit and New York, which have comparatively high levels of political decentralization. (Parallels to decentralization can be found in the smaller city school system, e.g., Syracuse.) The research should examine the entire range of issues which decentralization raises:

- What decisionmaking power is delegated to the districts and what is held centrally, especially in the key areas of budget, personnel and curriculum?
- What are the mechanisms for staffing district offices and what opportunities exist for involvement or participation of citizens' groups in that personnel selection process?
- What are the channels which the districts use to maintain contact with neighborhood organizations?
- Are there current analyses on community organization contact with district personnel and on what issues organizations contact district offices as compared with contacts with the central office with special emphasis on mandated organizations? If not, how best can these be undertaken?
- Do organizations use the decentralized structure? If so, how?
- Are the numbers of contacts between organizations and school systems higher in decentralized systems than centralized systems?
- What are the perceptions of leaders and members of organizational effectiveness in decentralized systems as compared to centralized systems?

Using data collected in comparatively decentralized systems, it should be possible to confirm or deny the central role of decentralization in determining the effectiveness of community organizations. Should the

evidence support our contention that decentralization is a key variable, it should then be possible to project Federal policies or supports which promote decentralization in local school districts and revitalize the role of community organizations.

Closely tied to the decentralization issue is the question of school board elections. The traditional conflict between district and citywide elections is an issue in many city school districts. The structure we noted in Atlanta, which included both at-large and district representatives, may represent a reasonable and effective compromise. Our research, while documenting some advantages to certain groups as between districts and citywide elected representatives, was not able to analyze fully the differences between the models and the implications of those differences for effectiveness of community organizations. Therefore, we recommend that further research be conducted which will compare citywide, district, and mixed patterns of elections. As in the decentralization research, the analysis would be focused on differences in terms of the types of issues with which organizations deal, the adequacy of the school board as a channel for community involvement, and the perceptions of organization members about the relationship of the board and school politics to the effectiveness of their organizations.

The decentralization and school board research can be joined for comparative analysis. The research ideally should be conducted in the same cities and the results compared, possibly using the following schema:

	Level of Decentralization		
Method of School Board Election	None	Administrative	Political
Citywide			
Mixed			
District			

Our findings suggest that as the level of decentralization increases and the method of election is brought to the district level, the access and effectiveness of organizations increases, as does the accountability of the system.

One of the most important findings of the Final Research Report was that the decisionmakers interviewed were able to identify the major areas of school policy under discussion while organization leaders showed less ability to recognize key issues. National issues of education policy, with the exception of desegregation, were almost never identified by organization leaders as key areas of concern and issues such as competency testing were totally ignored. This finding suggests a number of areas for further research and policy discussion.

The overriding concern of this research would be the nature and extent of school-to-community information flows. While attempts have been made to open up governmental processes to public scrutiny through measures such as the Freedom of Information Act and various sunshine laws, our findings suggest that these have been unsuccessful in providing the most important information to community organizations, parents and consumers. Our finding that organizations tend to rely on other community organizations to obtain information is an indictment of the existing official mechanisms for

communication. Information flow in the three cities studied can be described as either a mass of technical details which required a high level of sophistication to analyze, as in budgeting, or minimal public information and disclosure, as in professional personnel decisions. We recommend that research be encouraged which will systematically examine the existing information dissemination activities of school districts, with special attention paid to the character of those data and their usefulness to community organizations in addressing major policy questions.

Another issue raised in the Final Research Report relates to coverage provided by the media for education issues. Our review of major newspapers indicated only modest coverage of major school issues and even less analysis of those issues. The reporting that did occur consisted primarily of cursory summaries of school board meetings or desegregation related topics. Our findings suggest that one of the reasons that community organizations are unable to identify the major educational issues is the dearth of media treatment of the issues.

We would recommend that a research effort which analyzes media coverage of educational issues be conducted. The research should include all forms of media including major newspapers, neighborhood newspapers, special interest publications (e.g., union publications) and T.V. and radio coverage. The analysis should focus on the types of coverage presented (descriptive or analytic); the issues; and the extent to which the coverage is applicable to lower-income communities. From this analysis, programs can be developed which will provide training and background materials to those in the media responsible for reporting.

Cities: The Context for Organizational Activity

The potential for research in citizen participation, in the area of community organizations and school politics, is extensive. Our study of 16 community organizations, limited to three major cities with large minority populations, is more suggestive than conclusive in its findings. Certainly the research design, with some of the adjustments indicated in the study itself, can be extended to other large cities like Detroit, Baltimore, Denver, San Francisco, Dallas and Cleveland to achieve a broader cross section for purposes of comparative analysis. Additional research in other cities can be used to confirm or deny the major findings of our study that:

- there is an absence of neighborhood, independent, advocacy organizations in lower-income communities;
- the predominant organizational forms in lower-income communities are mandated and service-delivery and these are not very influential in affecting school policy; and
- multipurpose organizations, while historically placing a low priority on school issues, may under particular circumstances involve themselves in school policy issues.

Perhaps more important would be a look at middle-sized cities, since size has been demonstrated to be an important variable in influencing participation. Syracuse, Seattle, Portland, Hartford, Miami, Cincinnati, and Nashville are possible choices for middle-sized cities to be included in such a study.

An expanded city study could be designed to survey the types of organizations active in school politics and how these relate to the major issues confronting school systems. Such a study would not require

the extensive field research undertaken for the Community Organization Study. The areas of inquiry can be more limited and interviews with community leaders and members and decisionmakers can provide the bulk of the information necessary. Field observation can be selective and limited in scope. Our research indicated that even when organizations were involved with school system issues, they did not become involved with the major policy issues. Expanded analysis should focus on how particular issues come to the attention of organizations, and how the latter develop strategies to pursue their goals.

The selection of different cities is important not only to add to the sample and to vary size, but also to determine whether or not particular school systems have developed more than usually constructive approaches to encouraging citizen participation. Gittell and Hollander (1968), for instance, found Detroit to be slightly more encouraging to community organizations than the other cities in their study. Greenstone and Peterson (1973) in their study of antipoverty organizations found differences in implementation policies in comparing several cities. Some proved to be more encouraging than others to the participation of the poor. Our finding that class was a more pervasive factor in organizational effectiveness than city political culture should be further tested through an expanded study of a number of cities.

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